



Memorandum

**TO: DRIVING STRONG ECONOMY
COMMITTEE**

FROM: Stephen M. Haase

SUBJECT: Sign Code Amendments

DATE: September 14, 2004

Approved

Date

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the proposed sign code amendments.

BACKGROUND

The current sign code continues to adequately address signage issues for the vast majority of signage needs in the community. Changes to the Sign Code have been made over the past several years to address The Getting Families Back to Work initiative as well as ideas suggested by the development community and staff. Several additional specific areas for improvement have been identified in the past year by Councilmembers, customers and staff.

ANALYSIS

The following is a discussion by topic area of specific suggested amendments to the sign code. Several of the amendments would increase sign area allowed; others modify how existing signage area may be used on a building or site. The result of all these changes would be to allow more even application of signage regulations, allow staff to work on more creative designs, and to match signage to uses in a better manner.

Expand Skyline and roof Sign Allowance Citywide

Expand the current area rules for skyline and roof signs to apply them uniformly to all areas of the City with the exception of the Downtown Sign Zone. This would allow the building owners in the remaining areas of the city to enjoy the same signage as the Edenvale and North San José industrial areas. No change to the signage size is proposed with this amendment.

Modify Projecting and Fin Sign Provisions

Allow projecting or fin signs to be up to 25 square feet, to extend further away from the building and to project above the parapet of the building face. This change is intended to allow more creative signs that are visible oblique to the building face. In the neighborhood business districts such as Lincoln Ave and The Alameda, the current 10 square foot size makes it very difficult to design creative signs as tenants push for lettering sizes to make the readable which forces signs

into a typical box shape. Traditionally in these areas, distinct individual shapes for projected signs added to the character and interest of these shopping streets.

Expand Downtown Sign Zone Boundary

With the approval of the Civic Center Redevelopment Area and subsequent development of the 4th Street Garage, the New City Hall, and upcoming construction for the City Hall Garage and First United Methodist Church projects, it is appropriate to extend the current Downtown Sign Zone east of 4th Street to those areas with Downtown levels of development and that are integrated with the Downtown.

Broaden Mixed Use Signage Provisions

Allow signage for retail uses to extend beyond the retail floor(s) of the building. This was first considered with the Santana Row Development. As vertical mixed use development occur Citywide, the sign regulations should allow greater flexibility in how signs are located on building faces. As a comparison between a single use and mixed-use building, a typical retail building can have their sign placed on high parapets up to 30 feet high. A typical mixed-use building starts the residential use approximately 20 feet and many times as low as 14 feet from grade. This change would remove a penalty on sign placement for vertical mixed-use development and would apply citywide.

Update Downtown Sign Zone

The sign code was amended to create the Mixed Use Sign Zone to facilitate the Santana Row development. The new sign zone utilized the Downtown Sign Zone as a base but added signage capabilities not currently allowed in the Downtown Sign Zone such as pedestrian oriented programmable display sign. These should be added to the Downtown Sign Zone. With this change, the broadest signage allowed in the City would remain the Downtown Sign Zone. The Mixed Use Sign Zone would be the second broadest in scope.

Clarify Airport Sign Zone Provisions

This change would clarify that the sign face or message that is only visible from within the airport grounds would be subject to the Airport Sign Zone rules. This clarification would delete that reference to the sign structure being visible from off the airport property. This would allow greater flexibility for the Airport in placing signage directed at airport users without impacting the citywide ban on billboards.

Modify Commercial Center Detached Sign Provisions

The Sign Code currently allows one detached sign for large retail centers, regardless of how much frontage the center has over 600 feet. This treats a neighborhood center with a grocery store the same in many cases as a regional mall. The proposal is to allow a center the option of retaining the one larger, taller sign, or placing smaller signs in greater quantity on the frontage. One example of how this might apply is Valley Fair where the driveways do not have separate detached signs identifying the major tenants near a specific entrance; rather one larger sign is placed at the corner of Monroe Avenue and Stevens Creek Boulevard. Industrial properties currently allow this flexibility in secondary detached signs, limited to 20 square feet in size. The proposal also is

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to delete the setback formula for the taller detached signs. This provision results in signs removing parking and trees because the sign is located up to 20 feet from the street. The placement of the detached sign would be determined during the design review process. The height formula linking height to frontage would remain unchanged.

Create Live Work Sign Provision

The current code does not include an allowance for residential buildings that are used for live work arrangements other than what is allowed in the underlying zoning district. This results in some cases where the tenant is limited to one square foot for signage for home occupations in residential zones. The properties on Saratoga Avenue where the General Plan and PD Zoning were amended to allow flexibility of uses never had signage allowed to match the uses. This change would complete that effort.

NEXT STEPS

These proposed changes will be incorporated in a draft ordinance change that would be presented to the City Council at an October meeting. Outreach to the sign industry and the development community would occur prior to the Council consideration of the ordinance.

Changes also mentioned by customers but not addressed at this time include large programmable message boards in the Downtown and Airport Sign zones. Due to the relationship of those signs and the ban on billboards, additional research and public review is needed beyond the scope of this effort to provide quick results on a large number of ideas.

COORDINATION

This memo has been coordinated with the City Attorney's office and Airport Department.

STEPHEN M. HAASE, DIRECTOR
Department of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement